

## **Fear of the Lord?**

2nd Sunday of Lent (Year A)

March 8, 2020

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Next weekend, Bishop Brennan will be here to administer the sacrament of Confirmation to our school and PSR students. In the sacrament of Confirmation, we pray for the outpouring of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, courage, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. It is the last one- fear of the Lord- that needs the most explanation.

Traditionally, fear of anyone was meant to be a sign of respect. It was to acknowledge that they had power over us due to their position or authority. This was certainly true of parents, teachers, and priests, but especially true of God. After all, God is our ultimate Father and authority figure. Overtime, this fear of the Lord became very literal. It meant: be afraid of God, you better not mess up, and God is watching everything you do.

We see this literal fear of the Lord in today's Gospel account of the Transfiguration. In it, Peter, James, and John were up the mountain with the Lord. When Jesus began to shine like the sun and the voice from heaven said, 'this is my beloved son; listen to him,' the account says, "they fell prostrate and were very much afraid." While the Transfiguration was a revelation of the glory of God, they interpreted as something to be afraid of. If we were there, we would have probably responded the same way; the experience was so startling and out of the ordinary. It was only after Jesus approach them, touched them, and said, "rise, do not be afraid," that the three men recovered.

In more recent times, the gift of the Holy Spirit known as 'fear of the Lord' has been renamed by some as the gift of 'wonder and awe of the Lord.' This is a positive step forward in the evolution of our understanding of this gift. It retains the aspect of respect, but it rids the gift of the undertones of being afraid of God. The response of Peter, James, and John to the Transfigured Jesus should have been 'wonder and awe.' What happened was out of the ordinary, but not in the paranormal or scary sense. It was not meant to frighten, but to reveal the glory of God and the beloved-ness of Jesus as the Son of God. Perhaps by the end of the encounter, as Jesus warned them not to tell anyone of the experience until after the resurrection, they did have this gift of wonder and awe at what they experienced.

In today's world, fear language can get the desired effects, but it does not build relationships. Whether it is our relationship with God or others, in church or in politics, relationships need a more positive foundation. Fear, threat, and intimidation no longer lead to respect, but division. Whenever we can stand in wonder and awe of God and of others, we are experiencing the Holy Spirit, who brings unity and peace.

*The gift of the Holy Spirit known as the 'fear of the Lord' is more accurately described as 'wonder and awe of the Lord.'*

Does the glory of God lead me into fear or into wonder and awe?

This week, let us pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, both for ourselves and for our Confirmation class. May we have wisdom, understanding, counsel, courage, knowledge, piety, and wonder and awe of the Lord.